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# Reagan Urged To Take Sides In Persian Gulf

Behind closed doors, President Reagan's advisers are bitterly divided over U.S. policy toward the 3-year-old war between Iraq and Iran. Advocates are calling for a "tilt" toward one side or the other.

This would pull the administration away from its declared policy of neutrality in the Persian Gulf conflict—a conflagration that could ignite the oil fields that pump 8 million barrels a day.

At this time, the pro-Iraq forces in the State Department and the Pentagon may be winning the secret debate. But there is strong opposition on Capitol Hill and within the administration to any deviation from the official policy of "a plague on both your houses."

Those who favor a tilt toward Iraq have the heat of emotion on their side. Longstanding anti-Iranian sentiment has been fanned to a white heat by the strong suspicion that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was behind the slaughter of American Marines in Beirut. No less than Reagan has privately blamed the massacre on the Iranian Shiite Moslems supported by Khomeini.

The president's more militant advisers, such as Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, for one, favor a pro-Iraq policy as retaliation for the Beirut bombing.

But the neutralists and pragmatists argue that emotion is a poor guide for national policy, and insist that Iran's strategic importance far outweighs revulsion over its revolutionary leadership and the desire for revenge. They also point out that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is no better than Khomeini.

In a sense, a slight tilt toward Iraq is already in effect. Back in the spring of 1982, with scant warning, the State Department removed Iraq from the list of nations supporting international terrorism. This facilitated sales to Iraq by U.S. suppliers.

Last December, the Iraqis were allowed to buy 60 Hughes helicopters without so much as an export license or a State Department review. Since then, intelligence reports indicate that the choppers may have been modified for military use.

Although the sale occurred nine months before the Beirut bombing, there was no apparent cause-and-effect connection between the two events. It's not that the Iranians are immune to the virus of revenge, a source explained to my associate Lucette Lagnado, but simply that there were plenty of other reasons for Iranian terrorists to strike at the U.S. presence in Lebanon.

One form the pro-Iraq tilt could take, short of open support, is a cut-off of arms and spare parts to Iran. Many spare parts—necessary for Iran's huge stock of U.S. weapons dating back to the shah's regime—are sold to Tehran by such U.S. allies as Britain and West Germany. The Iranians have also been able to buy parts on the black market, and even some from American companies while the administration looks the other way.

Members of Congress are understandably leery of being considered pro-Iran, but Sen. Alan J. Dixon (D-Ill.) has prepared an amendment to the Export Administration Act that would put Iraq and Iran on the list of terrorist-supporting countries.

The pro-Iraq tilts in the State Department are so desperate to block Dixon's amendment that they have attempted to clean up Hussein's image. A cable from U.S. diplomats in Baghdad—which surfaced on the Hill—reported an interview in which Hussein claimed to have ended his support for Palestinian terrorists.

But when I checked into it, I found that the cable omitted Hussein's reason for ending his support: "because of Iraq's financial situation," not from any change of heart. In fact, the CIA reports that Iraq continues to be heavily involved in terrorist acts.